



U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

# Monthly Wholesale Trade

Sales and Inventories

October 1999

BW/99-10

Issued December 1999

## MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES OCTOBER 1999

**Important Notice:** In an effort to reduce cost and provide timely data, information from this report will only be available through the Internet beginning with the press release covering January 2000 data. Access to the data is free using the Internet site shown at the bottom of this page. If you have any questions or want a printed copy of future releases, please contact Scott Scheleur at 301-457-2779.

**Sales.** October 1999 sales of merchant wholesalers, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$232.8 billion, up 0.7 percent (+/- 0.6%) from the revised September level and were 10.1 percent (+/- 1.2%) above the October 1998 level. The September preliminary estimate was revised upward \$0.2 billion or 0.1 percent. Among durable goods, sales of motor vehicles and automotive equipment increased 3.1 percent from last month and metals and minerals, except petroleum grew 2.9 percent. October sales of nondurable goods increased 1.0 percent (+/- 0.7%) from September and were up 10.2 percent (+/- 1.5%) from last year.

**Inventories.** Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$299.4 billion at the end of October, up 0.3 percent (+/- 0.2%) from the revised September level and were 5.4 percent (+/- 1.0%) above October 1998. The September preliminary estimate was revised upward \$0.7 billion or 0.2 percent. End-of-month inventories of durable goods increased 0.6 percent (+/- 0.3%) from last month and were 4.7 percent (+/- 1.1%) above October 1998. Compared

to last month, inventories of furniture and home furnishings increased 3.9 percent, while machinery, equipment and supplies fell 1.1 percent. End-of-month inventories of nondurable goods decreased 0.3 percent (+/- 0.7%) from September but were up 6.6 percent (+/- 2.0%) from last year. Compared to last month, inventories of drugs, drug proprietaries and druggists' sundries increased 2.8 percent, while farm-product raw materials declined 9.3 percent.

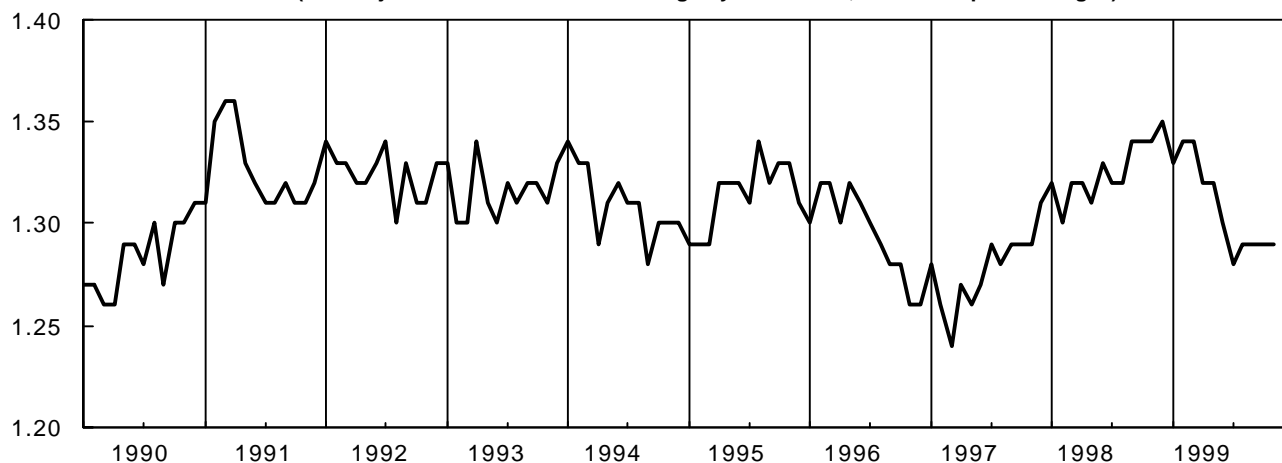
**Inventories/Sales Ratio.** The October inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.29. The October 1998 ratio was 1.34.

The scheduled release dates for 2000 are as follows: January 11, February 9, March 9, April 6, May 9, June 6, July 11, August 9, September 7, October 11, November 8, and December 11.

*Data in this report are based on a sample and, therefore, are subject to sampling and nonsampling variability. A discussion of the reliability of the data and general survey methodology appears in BW/98-A Current Business Reports.*

Monthly Wholesale Trade for November is scheduled to be released January 11, 2000 at 10:00 a.m.

**Monthly Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers: 1990 to 1999**  
(Data adjusted for seasonal and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)



Address inquiries concerning this report to Service Sector Statistics Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233, or call Scott Scheleur, 301-457-2779 or 301-457-2764. For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

This report is available on day of issue through the Department of Commerce's online Economic Bulletin Board (202-482-1986). The data are also available on the Internet - <http://www.census.gov/svds/www/mwts.html>.

Table 1. Estimated Monthly Sales, Inventories, and Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers: 1999 and 1998

[In millions of dollars]

SIC <sup>1</sup> code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories						Inventories/Sales		
		Monthly			Percent change			Monthly			Percent change			Ratios		
		Oct. 1999 (p)	Sep. 1999 (r)	Oct. 1998 (r)	Oct./ Sep.	Sep./ Aug.	Oct. 99 Oct. 98	Oct. 1999 (p)	Sep. 1999 (r)	Oct. 1998 (r)	Oct./ Sep.	Sep./ Aug.	Oct. 99 Oct. 98	Oct. 1999 (p)	Sep. 1999 (r)	Oct. 1998 (r)
<b>Adjusted<sup>2</sup></b>																
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>232,814</b>	<b>231,135</b>	<b>211,499</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>299,396</b>	<b>298,469</b>	<b>284,073</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>1.34</b>
<b>50</b>	<b>Durable</b>	<b>123,907</b>	<b>123,276</b>	<b>112,640</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>194,763</b>	<b>193,558</b>	<b>185,941</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>1.57</b>	<b>1.65</b>
501	Automotive	20,062	19,450	16,884	3.1	1.3	18.8	28,678	28,582	26,172	0.3	1.3	9.6	143	147	155
502	Furniture	4,239	4,126	3,866	2.7	-2.6	9.6	6,375	6,136	6,110	3.9	0.5	4.3	150	149	158
503	Lumber	8,701	8,790	7,804	-1.0	1.9	11.5	9,158	9,028	8,200	1.4	1.4	11.7	105	103	105
504	Prof. equip.	23,085	23,119	21,419	-0.1	-0.4	7.8	26,030	25,580	26,347	1.8	1.3	-1.2	113	111	123
505	Metals	7,766	7,550	7,725	2.9	-0.2	0.5	12,902	12,764	13,669	1.1	0.8	-5.6	166	169	177
506	Electrical	20,055	19,858	17,997	1.0	1.1	11.4	28,803	28,135	26,028	2.4	2.1	10.7	144	142	145
507	Hardware	6,581	6,616	6,340	-0.5	-3.3	3.8	13,173	13,165	13,252	0.1	0.2	-0.6	200	199	209
508	Machinery	20,527	20,735	19,625	-1.0	-0.6	4.6	51,335	51,915	48,904	-1.1	-0.2	5.0	2.50	2.50	2.49
509	Other Durable	12,891	13,032	10,980	-1.1	2.8	17.4	18,309	18,253	17,259	0.3	1.0	6.1	142	140	157
<b>51</b>	<b>Nondurable</b>	<b>108,907</b>	<b>107,859</b>	<b>98,859</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>104,633</b>	<b>104,911</b>	<b>98,132</b>	<b>-0.3</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>0.99</b>
511	Paper	8,551	8,496	7,730	0.6	1.4	10.6	10,023	10,063	9,232	-0.4	0.3	8.6	117	118	119
512	Drugs	12,294	12,367	10,731	-0.6	0.1	14.6	18,024	17,541	14,562	2.8	1.1	23.8	147	142	136
513	Apparel	7,783	7,696	7,216	1.1	0.7	7.9	11,384	11,404	12,735	-0.2	-1.2	-10.6	146	148	176
514	Groceries	31,205	31,030	29,333	0.6	1.6	6.4	18,739	18,546	16,875	1.0	0.6	11.0	0.60	0.60	0.58
515	Farm-products	8,419	8,246	8,821	2.1	0.8	-4.6	11,532	12,719	11,036	-9.3	6.8	4.5	137	154	125
516	Chemicals	4,429	4,403	4,597	0.6	-0.2	-3.7	4,703	4,707	4,873	-0.1	0.4	-3.5	106	107	106
517	Petroleum	13,227	13,290	9,936	-0.5	0.8	33.1	3,932	4,059	4,095	-3.1	0.4	-4.0	0.30	0.31	0.41
518	Alcohol	5,797	5,650	5,307	2.6	1.1	9.2	6,365	6,339	6,039	0.4	-2.7	5.4	1.10	1.12	1.14
519	Other Nondur.	17,202	16,681	15,188	3.1	-0.1	13.3	19,931	19,533	18,685	2.0	2.4	6.7	1.16	1.17	1.23
<b>Not Adjusted</b>														<b>Sales to date</b>		
														<b>1999</b>	<b>1998</b>	
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>237,790</b>	<b>237,320</b>	<b>222,269</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>302,145</b>	<b>292,712</b>	<b>286,558</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>2,241,811</b>	<b>2,110,248</b>	
<b>50</b>	<b>Durable</b>	<b>128,112</b>	<b>128,581</b>	<b>119,632</b>	<b>-0.4</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>194,352</b>	<b>192,697</b>	<b>185,559</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>1,203,897</b>	<b>1,136,005</b>	
501	Automotive	20,182	18,925	17,441	6.6	-1.5	15.7	28,735	28,210	26,198	1.9	2.8	9.7	188,150	168,234	
502	Furniture	4,476	4,353	4,226	2.8	-1.0	5.9	6,515	6,351	6,226	2.6	0.3	4.6	40,811	39,737	
503	Lumber	9,188	9,353	8,452	-1.8	-2.7	8.7	8,828	9,019	7,905	-2.1	0.2	11.7	86,901	77,163	
504	Prof. equip.	23,316	25,015	22,297	-6.8	7.4	4.6	26,290	25,247	26,584	4.1	0.4	-1.1	223,333	213,174	
505	Metals	7,929	7,663	8,049	3.5	-0.9	-1.5	12,644	12,624	13,409	0.2	-0.1	-5.7	77,523	81,652	
506	Electrical	21,519	21,526	19,635	0.0	4.9	9.6	28,371	28,304	25,638	0.2	0.2	10.7	192,276	176,815	
507	Hardware	6,989	6,914	6,885	1.1	-4.1	1.5	12,949	13,073	13,053	-0.9	-0.5	-0.8	68,142	64,917	
508	Machinery	20,281	20,445	20,174	-0.8	-2.1	0.5	50,924	51,032	48,562	-0.2	-1.6	4.9	203,588	202,204	
509	Other Durable	14,232	14,387	12,473	-1.1	10.6	14.1	19,096	18,837	17,984	1.4	1.8	6.2	123,173	112,109	
<b>51</b>	<b>Nondurable</b>	<b>109,678</b>	<b>108,739</b>	<b>102,637</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>107,793</b>	<b>100,015</b>	<b>100,999</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>1,037,914</b>	<b>974,243</b>	
511	Paper	8,816	8,938	8,093	-1.4	0.8	8.9	10,033	9,892	9,260	1.4	0.2	8.3	81,635	74,968	
512	Drugs	12,306	12,540	11,096	-1.9	2.4	10.9	18,294	17,208	14,795	6.3	1.8	23.6	119,086	101,756	
513	Apparel	8,484	8,735	8,147	-2.9	3.6	4.1	11,304	11,438	12,620	-1.2	-2.8	-10.4	78,146	57,598	
514	Groceries	31,174	30,937	30,272	0.8	-0.2	3.0	19,695	18,583	17,753	6.0	2.3	10.9	299,078	287,564	
515	Farm-products	9,000	8,073	9,650	11.5	7.7	-6.7	13,700	9,234	12,978	48.4	11.1	5.6	82,014	88,322	
516	Chemicals	4,456	4,368	4,744	2.0	-4.4	-6.1	4,609	4,622	4,776	-0.3	-1.3	-3.5	44,176	46,323	
517	Petroleum	13,372	13,064	10,274	2.4	-2.7	30.2	4,097	4,112	4,259	-0.4	3.1	-3.8	117,374	100,659	
518	Alcohol	5,814	5,803	5,583	0.2	-1.0	4.1	6,887	6,624	6,546	4.0	1.5	5.2	54,115	50,219	
519	Other Nondur.	16,256	16,281	14,778	-0.2	1.7	10.0	19,174	18,302	18,012	4.8	3.4	6.5	162,290	151,098	

p Preliminary estimate. r Revised.

1 For a full description of the SIC codes shown above, see the "1987 Standard Industrial Classification Manual" or the Current Business Reports

"Annual Benchmark Report for Wholesale Trade" publication.

2 Data adjusted for seasonal variations and, in the case of sales, also for trading-day differences. See Table 3 for seasonal adjustment factors used.

**Table 2. Coefficients of Variation and Standard Error for Sales and Inventories**

SIC code	Kind of Business	Coefficients of variation for level (x 100)				Standard error for trend				Coefficients of variation for level (x 100)		Standard error for trend
		Preliminary estimates		Final estimates		Ratio of two consecutive months		Year-to-year estimates		Cumulative sales estimates		Current year cumulative
		Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Current year	Previous year	to previous year cumulative
		Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median	Median			
	<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>50</b>	<b>Durable</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>
501	Automotive	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.8	1.1	0.7	2.4	3.1	4.7	5.0	1.9
502	Furniture	6.3	7.9	6.4	7.9	2.0	1.1	2.8	2.3	5.9	6.4	1.9
503	Lumber	5.7	5.4	5.7	5.3	1.3	0.8	1.9	3.2	5.7	5.7	1.4
504	Prof. equip.	6.7	7.0	6.6	7.0	1.4	0.5	3.3	2.0	6.6	5.7	3.1
505	Metals	5.2	10.7	5.1	10.7	1.1	0.7	1.6	2.2	5.0	5.0	0.8
506	Electrical	5.6	7.2	5.6	7.3	1.3	0.6	2.4	2.3	5.6	6.3	1.9
507	Hardware	5.6	6.6	5.6	6.6	1.2	0.7	1.8	2.0	5.6	5.5	0.9
508	Machinery	6.1	6.7	6.1	6.7	2.0	0.5	2.6	1.4	5.8	6.6	1.7
509	Other Durable	6.5	9.7	6.4	9.6	1.4	0.9	2.2	3.0	6.5	6.0	1.6
<b>51</b>	<b>Nondurable</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>
511	Paper	5.3	5.1	5.1	5.1	1.0	0.5	1.8	1.5	5.9	5.2	1.0
512	Drugs	6.2	4.7	6.2	4.7	1.0	0.6	2.4	1.6	6.0	6.7	1.6
513	Apparel	5.5	7.1	5.4	7.2	2.0	1.1	3.2	2.5	4.9	4.7	1.7
514	Groceries	3.1	5.1	3.1	5.0	0.6	0.6	1.1	1.4	3.0	3.3	0.8
515	Farm-products	7.0	8.9	6.8	8.9	2.3	1.5	2.9	4.1	6.9	5.7	2.3
516	Chemicals	5.3	6.1	5.4	6.3	1.2	0.9	1.9	2.6	5.2	5.6	1.0
517	Petroleum	7.0	13.6	7.0	13.7	1.0	1.3	1.6	1.9	6.7	6.7	1.4
518	Alcohol	6.0	8.5	6.1	8.5	1.5	1.2	1.9	2.0	5.9	6.4	1.4
519	Other Nondur.	6.6	9.1	6.8	8.3	2.0	1.1	3.8	4.2	7.3	5.6	2.7

**Note:** The median measures of variability are based on the most recent 12 months of data.

## Sample Design and Reliability of Data

There are two types of errors possible in an estimate based on a sample survey: sampling and nonsampling.

Sampling errors occur because observations are made on a sample, not on the entire population, and different samples could have led to different estimates. Standard errors and coefficients of variation, as calculated for this report, are measures of sampling variation. The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90% confidence interval. If, for example, the trend estimate is up 1.2% and the standard error is 0.9%, then the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.65 \times 0.9\%$  or  $\pm 1.5\%$ , and the 90% confidence interval is -0.3% to +2.7%. If the interval contains 0, it cannot be stated with certainty whether there was an increase or decrease. For monthly level, the coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value  $\pm 1.65 \times CV \times$  (the estimated value).

Nonsampling errors are usually attributed to many possible sources: (1) coverage error - failure to accurately represent all population units in the sample,

(2) inability to obtain information about all sample cases, (3) response errors, possibly due to definitional difficulties or misreporting, (4) mistakes in recording or coding the data obtained, and (5) other errors of collection or processing, or in imputing for missing or inconsistent data. Coverage error has an effect on the accuracy of estimates for this survey to the extent that the administrative records system, which forms the basis of our survey universe frame, does not contain all legal businesses. A major source of nonsampling error in the published estimates is due to the need to impute data for nonrespondents and for late and inconsistent reports. For all kinds of businesses combined, imputed data amount to about 31 percent of the total monthly wholesale sales estimates and 32 percent of the total monthly wholesale inventories estimates.

Nonsampling errors also occur in complete censuses. Although no direct measures of these errors have been obtained, precautionary steps were taken in all phases of the collection, processing, and tabulation of the data to minimize their influence.

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use, \$300

Table 3. Seasonal Adjustment Factors for Sales and Inventories of Merchant Wholesalers

SIC code	Kind of Business	Sales						Inventories					
		1999					1998	1999					1998
		Nov.	Oct.r	Sep.r	Aug.	Jul.	Oct.r	Nov.	Oct.r	Sep.r	Aug.	Jul.	Oct.r
	<b>U.S. Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>0.998</b>	<b>1.023</b>	<b>1.027</b>	<b>1.015</b>	<b>0.990</b>	<b>1.054</b>	<b>1.009</b>	<b>1.007</b>	<b>0.982</b>	<b>0.981</b>	<b>0.993</b>	<b>1.007</b>
<b>50</b>	<b>Durable</b>	<b>0.994</b>	<b>1.035</b>	<b>1.044</b>	<b>1.024</b>	<b>0.995</b>	<b>1.062</b>	<b>0.990</b>	<b>0.997</b>	<b>0.996</b>	<b>1.001</b>	<b>1.012</b>	<b>0.997</b>
501	Automotive	0.994	1.006	0.973	1.001	1.006	1.033	1.004	1.002	0.987	0.973	0.992	1.001
502	Furniture	1.068	1.056	1.055	1.038	0.975	1.093	0.994	1.022	1.035	1.038	1.026	1.019
503	Lumber	0.969	1.056	1.064	1.114	1.081	1.083	0.967	0.964	0.999	1.011	1.027	0.964
504	Prof. equip.	0.965	1.010	1.082	1.004	0.981	1.041	1.009	1.010	0.987	0.996	1.012	1.009
505	Metals	0.963	1.021	1.015	1.022	0.972	1.042	0.976	0.980	0.989	0.998	1.009	0.981
506	Electrical	1.001	1.073	1.084	1.045	0.998	1.091	0.985	0.985	1.006	1.025	1.029	0.985
507	Hardware	1.007	1.062	1.045	1.054	1.064	1.086	0.981	0.983	0.993	1.000	1.005	0.985
508	Machinery	0.983	0.988	0.986	1.001	0.979	1.028	0.985	0.992	0.983	0.997	1.012	0.993
509	Other Durable	1.073	1.104	1.104	1.027	0.960	1.136	0.990	1.043	1.032	1.024	1.012	1.042
<b>51</b>	<b>Nondurable</b>	<b>0.996</b>	<b>1.014</b>	<b>1.006</b>	<b>1.005</b>	<b>0.984</b>	<b>1.045</b>	<b>1.043</b>	<b>1.027</b>	<b>0.959</b>	<b>0.944</b>	<b>0.958</b>	<b>1.027</b>
511	Paper	0.982	1.031	1.052	1.058	0.953	1.047	1.022	1.001	0.983	0.984	1.000	1.003
512	Drugs	1.015	1.001	1.014	0.991	0.965	1.034	1.001	1.015	0.981	0.974	0.989	1.016
513	Apparel	0.937	1.090	1.135	1.103	1.039	1.129	0.972	0.993	1.003	1.019	1.029	0.991
514	Groceries	1.002	0.999	0.997	1.015	1.022	1.032	1.034	1.051	1.002	0.985	0.995	1.052
515	Farm-products	1.100	1.069	0.979	0.916	0.872	1.094	1.272	1.188	0.726	0.698	0.735	1.176
516	Chemicals	0.977	1.006	0.992	1.035	0.995	1.032	0.998	0.980	0.982	0.998	1.006	0.980
517	Petroleum	1.031	1.011	0.983	1.019	0.976	1.034	1.026	1.042	1.013	0.987	0.977	1.040
518	Alcohol	1.056	1.003	1.027	1.049	1.027	1.052	1.076	1.082	1.045	1.001	1.016	1.084
519	Other Nondur	0.927	0.945	0.976	0.959	0.963	0.973	1.003	0.962	0.937	0.928	0.937	0.964

r Revised.

1 Adjusted sales and inventories data shown in Table 1 are obtained by dividing the unadjusted data by the adjustment factors shown above for the corresponding group. Adjusted data for the totals are obtained by adding the durable and nondurable goods. Seasonal factors shown for the totals will provide an approximation of the adjusted estimates, but may show small differences from the published data.

Note: The seasonal factors shown have been computed based on monthly estimates through the current month preliminary estimates.

